



# Global Ties U.S. Community Impact Study

Credit: Madison Brooks, World Affairs Council  
of Kentucky & Southern Indiana

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By Cherie Saulter, Ph.D.

International exchange programs are a critical public diplomacy tool to support the building of strong international alliances. According to the U.S. Department of State, exchange programs directly contribute to both U.S. prosperity and security by building mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. As just one example, one in three world leaders in 2019 was an alumni of a U.S. Government-sponsored exchange program.<sup>1</sup>

Exchange programs have long been a way to humanize foreign affairs and build trust to deepen U.S. alliances. Yet an often-overlooked dimension of this work is the impact within the United States as global leaders participating in these programs spend time in U.S. communities nationwide. Research from Global Ties U.S. shows that federal spending on international exchange programs in the more than 80 communities we support has a 5:1 economic return on investment, meaning that it spurs greater spending to support these programs within the U.S. economy.<sup>2</sup> We also know through countless stories from our nationwide Network of nonprofit organizations that these visits also create something deeper. This study set out to quantify what that local impact is.

In 2022, Global Ties U.S. conducted a national survey of U.S. citizens who serve as local diplomats within their cities by representing the United States to the thousands of global leaders who visit their communities each year on exchange programs, primarily through the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP).

These U.S. citizen diplomats are the hosts of these global leaders, in both small towns and mega-cities, and those who take time to share their expertise and/or a meal with them. We refer to these citizen diplomats as resources (subject-matter experts) and volunteers (hospitality hosts). This last year alone (FY 2021), 7,553 volunteers contributed 135,268 hours of service to connect more than 4,400 exchange participants with their U.S. counterparts. We wanted to know the outcomes of that time spent and how participating in these exchange programs from the U.S. perspective impacted these local communities.

Through this first-ever Global Ties U.S. Community Impact Study, we found that community members who host these international leaders gain in global knowledge and cultural competence. Their work also creates greater opportunities for communities to come together and work together. Consistent with our knowledge of the economic return on the federal investment, we found that these international exchange programs also provide workforce development opportunities. Specifically, our findings reveal:

### **Participating in international exchanges increases global knowledge and cultural competence.**

- 86% of survey respondents agree that they have learned a great deal about the country and culture of international visitors.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/eca\\_fact\\_sheet\\_2019.pdf](https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/eca_fact_sheet_2019.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-dMMh1GhfurApmdvf\\_bHDNDSTPKgVR\\_k](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-dMMh1GhfurApmdvf_bHDNDSTPKgVR_k)

<sup>3</sup> Percentages are a combination of respondents who selected agree or strongly agree.



- 84% report that they learned more about international affairs and issues generally through their interactions with international visitors.
- 88% say that they are more likely to consider different cultural perspectives when evaluating issues and challenges.
- 80% agree that their comfort level has increased when encountering cultural differences.

### **International exchanges encourage local civic engagement and deepens community inclusion.**

- 79% of survey respondents have a greater appreciation for different cultural groups in their local communities.
- 77% say they are more likely to participate in events or activities in their local community that are sponsored by groups reflecting a national heritage different from their own.
- 58% are more likely to become more engaged with a local or community issue.

### **Hosting international exchange programs can generate economic impacts and workforce development in U.S. communities.**

- 80% of survey respondents say that international exchange programs enhance the image of their community as a good place to live.
- 77% agree that participation in these programs has enhanced the prestige of their organization or strengthened their personal reputation.
- 66% have learned new skills that help them to do their job better.
- 58% believe that international exchanges improve the ability of the local community to attract international investment.

### **Engagement with international exchange visitors increases international connectivity.**

- 32% of survey respondents have stayed in touch with international friends or business contacts they made through their participation in international exchanges.

We also found that the citizen diplomats who participate more frequently in international exchange programs emphasize these benefits more strongly. The more one engages, the greater the impact.

This study's findings show that international exchange programs help participants gain skills and resources that will allow them to thrive in a globalized economy, while simultaneously encouraging them to engage more deeply in their own local communities.

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